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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

POETRY.

IF any one were inclined to question that although the poet is born, the artist is made, this valuable reprint of George Meredith's early "Poems"* might be taken as testimony in the matter. Here we find the first draught of "Love in a Valley," as well as the poem which was the evident forerunner of "The South-wester" and "Hard Weather." The seed of all the Meredithian doctrines are here in embryo, but are not yet, as it were, fully in flower. An excellent exercise in criticism is a minute comparison of the early "Love in a Valley" and its completed form. In the magic stanza which Stevenson loved,

"When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,"

there is but one minute change. It must have sung itself into the young poet's brain as pure and perfect inspiration. The single change is in the last line:

"I should lose but one for so many boys and girls."

In the later draught the word "so" is omitted, giving ease and swing to the metre and a finer distinction to the sense.

The third line of stanza one, "Her knees folded up and her tresses on her bosom," is changed afterwards to the much freer, "Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly." The entire second stanza is greatly improved in the later draught. The earlier poem has but eleven stanzas as against twenty-six in the later one. The pictures of the Young Love stepping down the hills with her fair companions, and of all the girls out gathering primroses, are entirely omitted in the earlier version and also the loveliest flower passages, such as:

* "Poems Written in Early Youth." By George Meredith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.

"Yellow with bird-foot trefoil are the grass glades;
 Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew-gray leaf;
 Yellow with stone crop; the moss mounds are yellow;
 Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf.
 Green-yellow bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle,
 Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine;
 Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
 Thinking of the harvest; I look and think of mine."

The poem as it stands even in the first version has a young magic in it, but it is not the supreme poem that a great artist made it later.

It is interesting to note in the very earliest poems a certain Wordsworthian commonplaceness of expression, such as:

"It is to make the various skies
 And all the various fruits they vaunt
 And all the dowers of earth we prize
 Subservient to our household want."

Yet struggling through even here is the Meredithian mastery of phrase:

"The vessel took the laughing tides."

"The centre of the striving earth
 Round which the human fate is curled."

The set of quatrains on the English poets is disappointing, and only one, we note, is retained in the poet's later work, and this much altered. The "Rape of Aurora" is a preparatory study of "The Hymn to Color." "The Wild Rose" and "The Snow-drop" show the poet's early love of flowers and habit of close, exact observation. Some of the songs, notably "Love within the Lover's Breast" and "The Death of Winter," are charming, and he must indeed have been an austere critic of himself who cut them out of his later work.

It is said that a poet dies young in every man's breast. And doubtless it is true. Poetry must play a little always with magic and glamour and romance, and age turns instinctively to fact. The "Last Poems"* of George Meredith contain beautiful and eloquent passages, as the first description in "Como" and certain lines in "The Wild Rose," and, above all, the beautiful "Youth in Age" with its arresting line,

"And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,"

* "Last Poems." By George Meredith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.